

JOHN AND THE MUSHROOMS

By Johan Petri

A conversation consisting mainly of questions

“Here we are. Let us say Yes to our presence together in Chaos”

J C

Characters

JOHN – INVENTOR, COMPOSER, QUESTIONER

MERCE – DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER, QUESTIONER

YOKO – ARTIST, QUESTIONER

DAVID – PIANO PLAYER, QUESTIONER

ROSE – VIOLIN PLAYER, QUESTIONER

RICHARD – PROGRAM HOST (played by the same person as Yoko)

Each character, except Richard, has three boxes. These boxes are filled with different “things”. With the help of chance a certain number of these “things” are picked out to be part of the performance that is being played when it is played.

SCENE 1

In Johns loft, music and happenings

JOHN

Here is were I sleep.

At evening, the distant lowing of some cow in the horizon beyond the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first I would mistake it for the voices of certain minstrels by whom I was sometimes serenaded, who might be straying over hill and dale; but soon I was not unpleasantly disappointed when it was prolonged into the cheap and natural music of the cow.

YOKO *sitting in the audience*

I see John as a little boy – Little John – playing the violin in his room. Without a violin.

JOHN

Here is were I sleep.

We travel through time and space and our ears are in perfect condition.

MERCE *sitting in the audience*

What is he doing?

DAVID *sitting in the audience*

He is conducting?

MERCE

And what and who is he conducting?

JOHN

Here is were I sleep.

Here I wake up.

Nichi nichu kore ko niche.

MERCE

Nichi nichu kore ko niche?

JOHN

Every day is a good day.

YOKO

Little John sits in his room.

He is building a house with building blocks.

In the house lives the silence.

And the building blocks are invisible.

JOHN

My father was an inventor, and he had a very beautiful idea for space travel – going to the moon and such things. My father invented a submarine which had the world's record for staying underwater. But it never entered his mind that the value of staying underneath water lay in being invisible to people above. Because his engine ran on gasoline it left bubbles on the surface of the water. So his sub wasn't used. My Father said he did his best things when he was sleeping, deeply. Now I am going to invent. I invent new ways of listening. I invent new questions. Every day is a good day ...

MERCE, YOKO *softly*

Nichi nichu kore ko niche

JOHN *he hears the others*

... and everyday a new invention. Every day is a good day and every day new questions.

Merce, Yoko, David and Rose enter

MERCE

What are you doing?

JOHN

I am conducting.

DAVID

And who or what are you conducting?

JOHN

The silence.

YOKO

The silence?

JOHN

If I had something to see, would it be theater?

MERCE

Where shall I start?

JOHN

You can always start wherever. I don't think that what I decide is better than what you decide and I don't think that what you decide is better than what Yoko decides and I don't think that what Yoko decides is better than what David decides and I don't think that what David decides is better than what Rose decides. I think that everything can be there at the same time and I think that everything can be silent.

YOKO

Is a truck passing by music?

JOHN

Instructions!

MERCE, ROSE

Instructions?

JOHN *starts to take down the boxes*

Yes, I am going to show how we can build. Maybe there is someone here who knows what theater is ... but not what it can become, if we do like this.

MERCE

So, now you are deciding.

JOHN

Yeah, well, I am suggesting how we can do something together, without somebody deciding.

YOKO

Which is more musical, a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?

JOHN

Yoko, come, come! Here are five boxes. One is yours and one is yours and one is yours and one is yours and one is mine. In each box there are things.

MERCE

Things?

JOHN

Our things. Different things one can do, or say, and questions, and sounds.

YOKO

Are sounds just sounds or are they Beethoven?

MERCE

People aren't sounds, are they?

JOHN

The boxes, here, right. You take a dice and you throw it ...

Throws the dice – Three!!!

that means that you should pull ...

MERCE

Pull?

JOHN

Yes, you take this deck of cards

John gives Yoko the deck to hold

Then you pull three cards. You can close your eyes if you like.

JOHN *cont.*

He pulls three cards from the deck

If the first card says seven, right then you take up thing number seven from the box and then if the next card says eleven then you take up thing number eleven and then if it says number nineteen on the third card you take up thing number nineteen and then you have three things and we can start. Oh yes, I thought we could end with this ... eeh, the new?

ROSE

Once upon a time?

JOHN

Exactly, yes!

They all start throwing dice, pulling cards

MERCE

No, I think I think or feel or this is very new, a slight worry, not to know how it's going to be.

JOHN

I can't understand why you are afraid of new ideas. I am frightened of the old ones. Think about it as if you are involved in some kind of discovery.

YOKO

John, it is inevitable; these are nice people, but some of them are going to laugh. Is that all right ?

JOHN

Sure. I consider laughter preferable to tears.

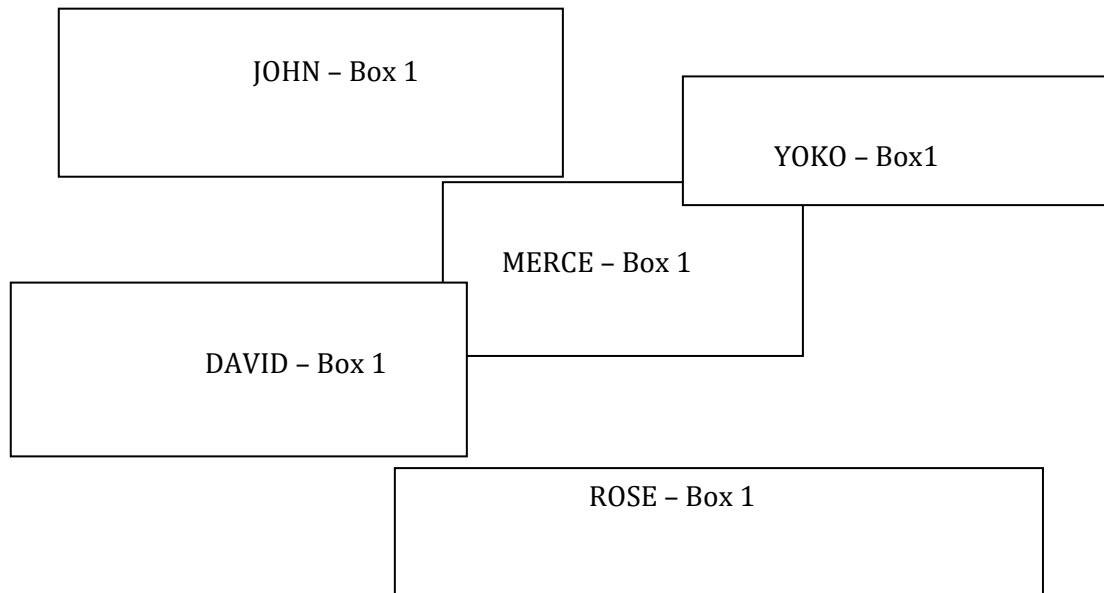
DAVID

I start now.

The Perilous Night 2

SCENE 2

With the help of chance all the performers pull out things from Box One to perform. The scene take 9 minutes.



Intermezzo: Story a quartet of voices

ROSE starts singing

Once upon a time, a time. Once upon a time. Once upon a time, a time. ...

ALL the others join

Once upon a time

The world was round

and you and it

and you could go on it

around and around and around

Merce moves, stops, sits down

SCENE 3

MERCE

No, I think I think or feel or there is a lot of movement going on, here inside, say like as if the body keeps on even though I have stopped. Can you see how it is moving here inside when I am still, or can you see how still I am when I run?

JOHN

A sound has no legs to stand on.

MERCE

People aren't sounds, are they?

John goes to the window

Wait!

Shall I talk now, when you don't?

What if we talk at the same time!

They all start talking simultaneously

MERCE *cont.*

Nooo, I think I think or ... What does it become of all that is happening, together, at the same time? I wonder. Does it work?

YOKO

Yes! I do my thing and you do your thing and it becomes together.

MERCE

Become together? Is that together, what I do and what you do. Differ together?

YOKO

Yes, at the same time here, nowhere else, then it becomes like that. I do and you do and we live in it. I can not differ, I am I, but want together.

MERCE

I wonder. Slight worry. What does it mean what you are saying?

YOKO

I don't know. I maybe know? You ask me, and then I answer and then a new question is born.
John, can a question be an answer?

JOHN

All answers are answers to all questions.

MERCE

So, we'll do it again.

JOHN

Why shall we do it again, we make something new. We make what's new.

YOKO

What is the new?

DAVID

Is it high?

ROSE

Is it low?

MERCE

Is it in the middle?

DAVID

Is it soft?

YOKO

Is it loud?

ROSE

Are there two?

MERCE

Are there more than two?

DAVID

Is it a piano?

JOHN

Why isn't it?

An airplane can be heard at a distance

ROSE

Was it an airplane?

MERCE

Is it a noise?

JOHN

Is it music?

The sound of the airplane fades away

DAVID

Is it softer than before?

ROSE

When will it stop?

YOKO

What's coming?

JOHN

Is it time?

Silence

MERCE

Is it very short?

YOKO

Very long?

ROSE

Just medium?

Silence – then music

JOHN

It is maybe a strange idea but a mushroom lives such a short time and if you happen to come upon it when it is fresh and ready it is like you happen to hear a sound, that also lives a short time.

MERCE

People are not mushrooms. I am no mushroom. I am a mushroom.

YOKO

People are a long time.

JOHN

Some are in the same time. We for example. That is good.

MERCE

Yes, I think time is good here, but it feels like it is decided.

YOKO

It is not, it changes, everything changes.

JOHN

What time is it?

MERCE, YOKO, DAVID, ROSE

Quarter past ten.

JOHN

Now we make something new, let's build something again, it is time ...

YOKO *interrupts*

Yees, it takes time to do things, to do things and build.

MERCE

If we don't do things, what feeling is that?

YOKO

All right, but now we are doing things and that takes time.

JOHN

Wait, I like Merce's question, Merce hug. It's exciting. I also wonder or ... Can't we not do things?

They not do things for a while.

YOKO

What time is it?

MERCE, JOHN, DAVID, ROSE

Quarter past ten.

YOKO

Now we make something new, let's build something again.

JOHN

Is there such a thing as silence?

YOKO

Can David and I suggest a different way of not deciding.

*They show a new way of how to let chance decide
what instructions to perform.*

Maybe there is someone here who knows what theater is ... but not what it can become.

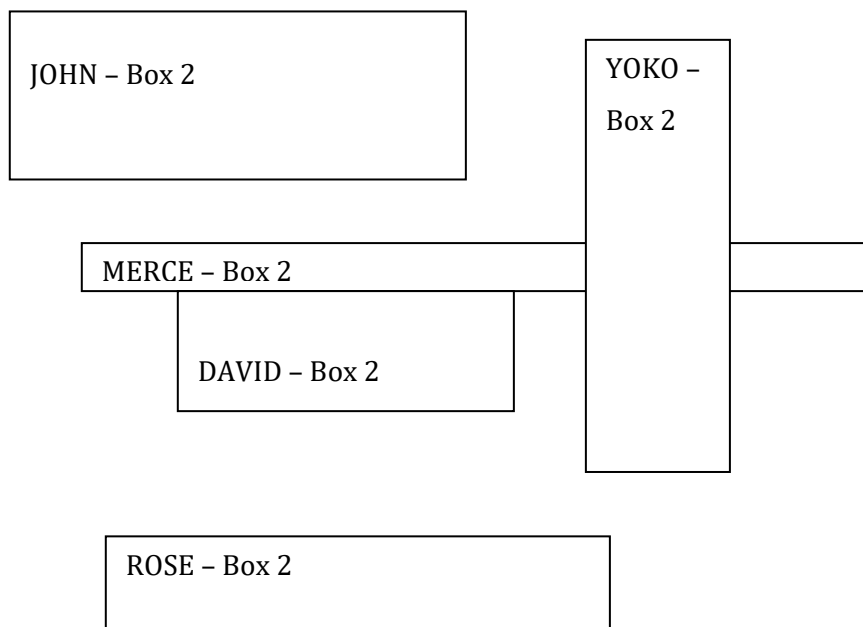
DAVID

If we do like this.

Attacca music, continues into the next scene.

SCENE 4

With the help of chance all the performers pull out things from Box Two to perform. The scene take 9 minutes.



Intermezzo: Story a quartet of voices

ROSE *starts*

Once upon a time, a time. Once upon a time. Once upon a time, a time. ...

ALL

Once upon a time

The world was round

and you and it

and you could go on it

around and around and around

*In the middle of the song John walks away, to the
window, looking out*

SCENE 5

YOKO

What are you doing? We are right in the middle of the music and you just stand there looking out the window?

JOHN

I fantasize about a bridge.

YOKO

A bridge? Where is it supposed to lead?

JOHN

From this shore to the other shore.

YOKO

And what ... do you imagine that this bridge is made out of?

JOHN

It's made out of sounds.

MERCE

No, I think I think or feel or ... if I can't hear the sounds I guess I can't walk over the bridge?

YOKO

You are building a bridge out of sounds that nobody can hear. One can build with everything. I want to take all wishes and build one, big, wish. I want to stay here. I want all of us to stay here, I don't want us to leave, over the bridge or anywhere else. It is here that it's happening.

Music, actions

SCENE 5B

RICHARD

Oh oh oh, Hi there!, hi there! Now will we have our next contestant, please will you come in!

*John has, since the beginning of the performance
been building a sound-sculpture. It is this he is now
going to show and play music on.*

John comes in

Will you tell our audience please, what your name is and where you'r from.

JOHN

My name is John Cage and I am from Stony Point, New York.

RIKARD

Mr Cage, and he's from New York. Mr Cage is a musician, he's a composer and he teaches a course in music at The New School here in New York. So, Mr Cage if you whisper your secret to me so that nobody out there can hear it, and then we can start.

JOHN

John whispers in Richards ear, his voice can be heard softly from different places/loudspeakers around the room:

I'm going to perform one of my musical compositions ...

RIKARD

Aha, that's very interesting. And there must be more?

JOHN

John whispers in Richards ear, his voice can be heard softly from different places/loudspeakers around the room:

The instruments I will use are: a Water Pitcher, an Iron Pipe, a Goose Call, a Bottle of Wine, an Electric Mixer, a Whistle, a Sprinkling Can, Ice Cubes, 2 Cymbals, a Mechanical Fish, a Quail Call, a Rubber Duck, a Tape Recorder, a Vase of Roses, a Seltzer Siphon, 5 Radios, a Bathtub, and a Grand Piano.

RICHARD

All right! I think we have a magnificent demonstration to make.

Mr Cage, I know that you teach a course in experimental ... sound ...

JOHN

Experimental music.

RICHARD

Experimental music. Aha, will you tell us quite seriously whether or not you consider what we're about to hear music. No tongue and cheek, but seriously.

JOHN

Perfectly seriously, I consider music the production of sounds and since in the piece which you will hear I produce sounds I will call it music.

RICHARD

You will call it music, all right. Inevitable Mr Cage, these are nice people but some of them are going to laugh. Is that all right?

JOHN

Of course, I consider laughter preferable to tears.

RICHARD *takes John by the hand*

Oohoh, I'm with you boy ! All right, let's see this instrument! That's it!
The title of the composition is what Mr Cage?

JOHN

Water Walk, because it contains water and because I walk during it's performance.

RICHARD

That figures, doesn't it.

Intermezzo:

WATER WALK - sculpture, music, movement

SCENE 6

YOKO

Think about what the person next to you is thinking.

They think

MERCE

Dance is like water.

YOKO

Huuushh ...

They think

MERCE

I think I think or feel or ... don't you get lonely when you think? Can we not think together?

JOHN

Do I have to have my thinking hat on to be able to think? Or is it enough if I bite my lips? Or, if I'm in a room should I then walk back and forward like an animal in a cage, would that help? Can't I just simply think?

YOKO

Once upon a time the world was round and you could walk on it around and around. Everywhere there was somewhere and everywhere there they were men women children dogs cows wild pigs little rabbits cats lizards and animals. That is the way it was. And everybody dogs cats sheep rabbits and lizards and children all wanted to tell everybody all about it and they wanted to tell all about themselves.

And then there was Rose.

Rose was her name and would she have been Rose if her name had not been Rose. She use to think and then she use to think again.

JOHN

Think and then ...

ROSE, JOHN

...think again.

JOHN

But as Merce said ...

MERCE *avbryter*

Asked!

JOHN

As Merce asked ... Can't we think together?

He closes the window

I never had a hat, I have never had one on, but a while ago I was give an brown suede hat.

As soon as I put it on I realized how much I had been longing for a hat. I kept it warm by having it on all the time and I thought that I especially should have it on when I was thinking.

Somewhere in Virginia I lost my hat.

MERCE

That's why we need to think together. About where it is, Johns hat.

YOKO

Not me.

MERCE

I am doing it, it feels calm.

ROSE

It gets quiet then.

JOHN

It never gets quiet. I have closed the window, but quiet.

YOKO

Of course it feels calm to think about a hat. I think about you, or Rose or somebody else who thinks about somebody else who thinks about somebody else. That feels not calm, but good.

MERCE

I see a hat, I see your body but not what's in it.

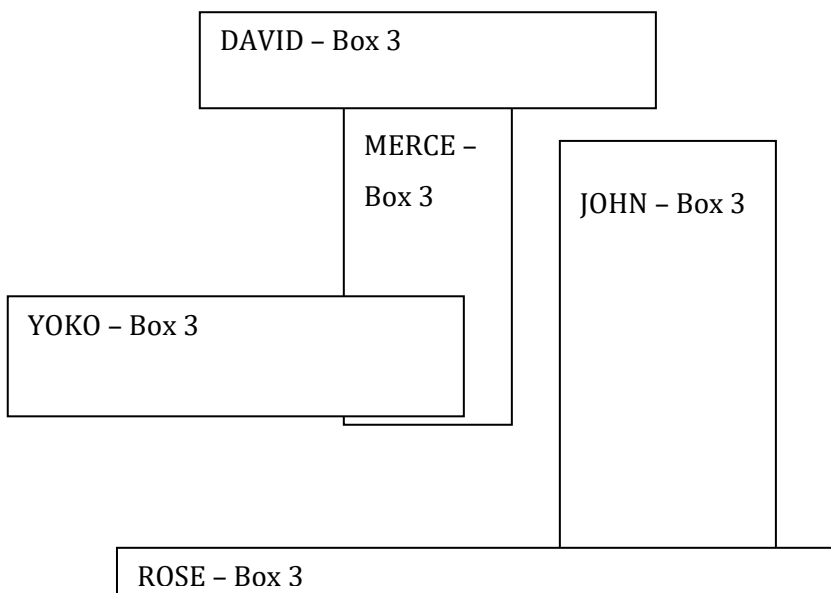
JOHN

Can't you two stop. It was just a hat.

Don't think. Now we make something new.

SCENE 7

With the help of chance all the performers pull out things from Box Three to perform. The scene take 9 minutes.



Yoko puts her ear on Merce's stomach

SCENE 8

YOKO

Put your ear against a stomach and listen to the sound of the blood rushing through.

They all put their ears to somebody else's stomach

DAVID

You'r alive!

MERCE

MERCE lifts his head up from the stomach.

And then it got quiet!

JOHN

When I narrow down my ears, and listen closely, it's like as if I make the sounds into music.

When we hear the sounds we become humans.

John, who during the performance has been opening and closing the window, now opens it again.

YOKO

Listen to the earth moving.

They all listen

JOHN

Sometime it's like as if the silence escapes me.

MERCE

What do you do then?

JOHN

I play it again. Sound by sound.

They all listen briefly

CODA: Story *a quartet of voices*

ALL start singing

Once upon a time, a time. Once upon a time. Once upon a time, a time. ...

*They sing just the beginning of the song, there is a
long TOGETHER-SILENCE*

ROSE starts again

a time a Once upon a time Once upon a time Once upon a time a Once upon a time...

ALL the others join

Once upon a time

The world was round

and you and it

and you could go on it

around and around and around